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ABSTRACT

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take college-level courses and receive credit at both institutions toward the completion of a college degree. Such programs are also referred to as concurrent enrollment, joint enrollment, or dual credit. This brief discusses the advantages and drawbacks of dual enrollment programs. Currently, more than 30 states are operating or have passed legislation establishing dual enrollment programs. The rules and regulations that govern such programs vary significantly, and funding for these programs varies among states. State involvement in dual enrollment programs is extensive. Such programs offer many benefits for students, including reduction of the senior drop out rate, the accumulation of college credits while still in high schools, and lower costs for students resulting from less time required to earn a degree. Benefits can also be identified for colleges and universities, high schools, and society. Concerns center on costs for students and institutions, program quality, faculty issues, transferability, and institutional liability. Dual enrollment programs represent a trend with a strong future, and can be expected to serve a number of different purposes. (Contains 39 endnotes.) (SLD)

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The Open Door...assessing the promise and problems of dual enrollment

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The Open Door . . .

assessing the promise and problems of dual enrollment

Overview

In its report *The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding a Better Way,* the National Commission on the High School Senior Year notes that " . . . National life and the economy are changing faster than our schools. . . . The nation faces a deeply troubling future unless we transform the lost opportunity of the senior year into an integral part of our students' preparation for life, citizenship, work, and education."[1] While the report does not universally label American schools as failures, it does offer an ominous warning of what the future may hold unless we find a way to bridge this and other apparent disconnects between postsecondary and K-12 education.

In highlighting a number of potential solutions to the lost opportunities of the senior year, the report gives only passing mention to the concept of dual enrollment. However, despite serious concerns surrounding dual enrollment, it is a viable option. When properly developed and managed, such programs can bridge the gap between K-12 and postsecondary education. Dual enrollment can also help to ensure that our educational institutions are producing the quality citizenry needed to meet the ever-changing demands of business and society.

AASCU institutions are well positioned to take the lead in administering such programs. As regional institutions, they are able to assess regional and community needs and design programs to meet those needs. Such programs can generate revenue and increase enrollments, as students who start a degree at an institution may be more likely to complete the degree at that institution. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, dual enrollment provides an opportunity to smooth the transition to postsecondary education, thus increasing the likelihood that students will complete a postsecondary program and be better prepared for the demands of an information-based economy and society.

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high school

DUAL ENROLLMENT

college

What is Dual Enrollment?

Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to take college level courses and receive credit at both institutions toward the completion of a college degree.[2] Such programs are also referred to as concurrent enrollment, joint enrollment, or dual credit. Often dual enrollment programs are equated with advanced placement (AP) courses. While there are a number of similarities, they differ in some key features, including how credit is earned, transferability of credit, method of instruction, where instruction takes place, and cost.[3]

The Advanced Placement Program has a history dating back to about 1950. Dual enrollment, while dating back to the 1970s, did not begin to gain popularity until the mid-1980s. At this point, states became increasingly involved in dual enrollment programs in an attempt to ensure that gifted or other qualified students would have access to college courses while still enrolled in high school.[4] Often, the intention was to provide gifted high school students with more challenging coursework than may have been available to them in their high school.

Some dual enrollment programs are designed to decrease dropout rates. Advocates of these programs believe that many students drop out of school because they also do not feel challenged by the work they are doing. High schools may retain such at-risk students by offering them more challenging coursework.[5]

Some programs have also been expanded to include all seniors as a means to combat "senioritis"—the feeling that the senior year in high school does not matter because colleges and universities only consider work done through the junior year in making admissions decisions.[6] Dual enrollment is seen as a way of more effectively utilizing the senior year by preparing students for the work they will receive in college.

State Programming

Currently, more than thirty states are operating or have passed legislation establishing dual enrollment programs.[7] In large part, the programs operate with the same primary intent - assisting students in the transition from high school to college by allowing them to enroll in and earn college credit for college-level work while they are still in high school.

While the purpose of dual enrollment is similar in most states, the rules and regulations that govern the programs vary significantly. For instance, while most states have codified basic requirements for participation, others take eligibility requirements further. In the case of Florida, Hawaii, Michigan, and Mississippi, students must also take a placement exam to determine eligibility.[8]

Similarly, while most states have established basic program structures through legislation, some states go further to designate the level at which credit will be earned (high school, college, or both). In the case of Arizona, Connecticut, and North Dakota, no specification of the type of credit earned is made.[9] Additionally, while many states have determined that dual enrollment credit courses will count toward high school

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graduation, Washington and Wisconsin have chosen to leave that determination to local school boards.[10]

Funding for such programs also varies among the states. Most states have mandated funding sources as well as determining who pays for dual enrollment programs. The variations occur in determining who pays. In the instance of Georgia, eligible programs are paid through a state funded grant program; in Texas, junior colleges are allowed to waive tuition; and in Wisconsin, local school districts pay the costs.[11]

While a number of states ultimately do cover the costs of dual enrollment programs, some states do not. In the case of Arkansas and other states, students are solely responsible for covering costs, while Colorado and others have elected to reimburse a student upon successful completion of a course.[12]

Accountability is also an issue in which states have taken a great interest. Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Michigan have all mandated that high schools or postsecondary institutions provide accountability reports to the state on an annual basis. In the case of Michigan, schools must annually report the number and percentage of students participating, the number of college-level courses offered, the number and percentage of students participating in the previous year, as well as the number of students taking college-level equivalent credit examinations.[13]

To ensure that student needs are met, some states have gone so far as to require counseling services at either the high school or college level. State laws in Georgia and Idaho mandate full services as well as information regarding possible consequences of college-level study, such as course availability, financial responsibilities, and consequences of failing.[14]

Based on the preceding discussion, it appears that state involvement in dual enrollment programs is extensive. It also appears that states have maintained their interest in the viability of such programs. In the 1999 and 2000 legislative sessions, 16 states worked on legislation regarding dual enrollment—three with the intention of establishing or studying the establishment of programs.

In addition to the establishment of dual enrollment programs, states have worked to improve program operations. In 2001, Arizona moved to tighten reporting restrictions on dual enrollment programs. Until then, institutions at both levels had been able to include students in their enrollment figures. Taxpayer groups asserted that the state was wasting money by supporting the same student at both levels of instruction. Responding to this criticism, lawmakers required that the state's auditor identify dual enrollment students and exclude them from enrollment figures used in calculating state appropriations. [15]

In 2002, legislators are considering several proposals impacting the operation of dual enrollment programs:

Mississippi—In an attempt to make programs more accessible to students, community college officials in Mississippi will ask lawmakers to relax program entrance

guidelines. To ease access, officials will ask that the state eliminate the minimum ACT score a student must achieve before enrolling in a program.[16]

Pennsylvania—Community college officials will ask for a permanent exemption that will allow them to count high school students taking college courses when making their funding requests to the state.[17]

Vermont—Legislators will examine how their programs are financed. In some instances, students bear the costs. In others, it is the local school district or the college that bears the cost. Changes being proposed would simplify payment systems so each student is treated the same when payments are assessed.[18]

Additionally, some states have already taken actions affecting dual enrollment programs:

Massachusetts—Lawmakers stripped the state's dual enrollment program of funding mid-year. Funding was restored for ten institutions because the state's Department of Education had already cut checks before the loss of funding. Unfortunately, it appears that 17 institutions may receive no funding for the spring semester. Some institutions have decided to continue the programs by absorbing the costs or offering cut-rate tuition to students.[19]

Michigan—The state's attorney general recently released an opinion regarding the acceptance of dual enrollment credit. In her opinion, Attorney General Jennifer Granholm held that institutions had the authority to accept or refuse credits that were also used to satisfy high school requirements, even though current state law allows for credits to be used both ways.[20]

Benefits for Students

Dual enrollment programs offer many benefits to students and their families. Conducting college level work while still in high school can better prepare a student for the demands of post-secondary education. In recent years, some students enter colleges and universities lacking the basic study skills they need to attain a degree.[21] Dual enrollment programs can help alleviate this problem.

Dual enrollment programs that include at-risk students can reduce the senior drop-out rate.[22] By offering the student the challenge of college level studies, schools increase the chances that a student will remain enrolled.

Another benefit is the accumulation of college level credits while a student is still in high school. Because participants earn college credit for their work, they have the opportunity to complete their baccalaureate or associate's degree in less time than traditional students.[23]

Additionally, less time to earn a degree means lower costs for students. Because students are still in high school, many school districts will actually cover the costs associated with dual enrollment; they consider it part of the high school educational experience. In other cases, costs are shared between the student and the school district.[24] Regardless of who covers costs, dual-enrolled students ultimately enjoy the benefit of

completing a post-secondary degree at a substantially lower cost than their colleagues.

Benefits for Colleges and Universities

Postsecondary institutions also benefit from dual enrollment programs. They may enjoy added revenue and increased access to potential enrollees.[25] Dual enrollment programs open new pathways to recruitment and retention at the college and university level. Offering a high school student the opportunity to begin work on an associate or baccalaureate degree prior to completing high school can be very attractive to students concerned about the cost of a college education and the length of time to degree. Additionally, by granting credit for work completed at the college level, an institution may retain a student to degree completion simply because the student has already completed some of the work at that institution.

Dual enrollment also provides a potential revenue source. In most instances, such programs are not offered free of charge. At the very least, the participant—whether it is a school district or an individual student—will pay some portion of the tuition and fees associated with their studies. In coming years, these revenues could become more vital to public institutions as state funding continues to decline as a source of institutional support.

Colleges and universities that offer dual enrollment increase their visibility within their service areas. Dual enrollment programs can attract top high school students who otherwise might not have considered a community college or local university. Once enrolled, these students may be more likely to complete a degree at the institution.[26]

Finally, these programs serve an important engagement function for postsecondary institutions. In recent years, institutions have been urged to become more involved with the communities in which they are rooted. Increasingly, colleges and universities are accepting greater responsibility in local economic and social development. Dual enrollment can serve a vital social function by uniting educational systems to create well-rounded, better-prepared students.[27]

Benefits for High Schools

There are two primary benefits for high schools. First, is the improved communication resulting from the collaboration with a college or university. Through collaboration, high schools can learn more specifically what is expected from students at the college level and alter their current academic and curricular practices as needed to prepare students effectively.

High schools also benefit from these programs because they allow for an expanded curriculum. For schools with limited funds for new programs, dual enrollment programs can provide additional curricular options. In turn, an expanded curriculum has the potential to develop students who are better prepared to meet the demands of post-secondary education.

Benefits for Society

Dual enrollment serves a number of societal functions, including preparation of students for the world of work. It is increasingly evident that many high school graduates, as well as those who

drop out, are unprepared for work. This lack of preparation may lead students to low-paying, dead-end jobs, as well as extended periods of unemployment.[28]

The discipline required by college-level studies, as well as the subjects studied, can help to ensure that the student entering the workforce immediately after high school is more focused and better qualified for employment. Ultimately, such preparation may reduce the likelihood that the student will become a drain on society's resources through unemployment payments, welfare programs, or criminal activity.[29]

Concerns

Cost: One of the chief policy concerns relative to dual enrollment is who pays for the program. In many cases, states pay all or a significant portion of program costs. This payment is often filtered through public high schools, which pay program fees for students who enroll. Dual enrollment costs also may be paid from a state budget pool set aside specifically for that purpose. Under either option, a potential criticism of these programs is that states (essentially, taxpayers) are paying twice to educate the same set of students.

An alternative financing strategy for dual enrollment is for students and parents to pay all or part of course fees. The result under this alternative, however, is that dual enrollment opportunities are available only to those students who can afford them. Because dual enrollment programs are sometimes intended to encourage college attendance among cohorts who otherwise might not participate, as well as to ease the transition from high school into college, this financing method places at-risk and low-income students at a disadvantage.

To be efficient, dual enrollment programs should provide educational opportunities for high school students that are not available in the high school itself. Although the decision regarding what courses are included in dual enrollment programs is generally made locally and based on districts' educational needs, some state wide programs deny credit for courses already offered by local high schools, as well as physical education or arts classes and remedial/development courses.

Program Quality: The quality of education provided by dual enrollment programs is also of concern. Many of these programs are intended to provide high school upperclassmen with an opportunity for rigorous, advanced academic study. However, some college professors feel that dual enrollment programs are neither rigorous enough to warrant college credit nor to prepare students for the realities of the college classroom.[30] In March 2001, the South Dakota Board of Regents banned dual enrollment courses from counting toward college credit, due to concerns about the courses' lack of rigor.

Various dual enrollment programs employ a number of strategies to ensure high quality. These include:

Involving college faculty in the selection of the course text(s) and the preparation of course syllabi when courses are taught by high school faculty,

Having dual enrollment students take the same assessments as their college counterparts, or

having them take the appropriate subject-area Advanced Placement exam, and

Complete uniformity in course syllabi, textbooks, and grading scales between dual enrollment and regular college courses, as in the long-standing Syracuse University Project Advance program initiated in 1973.[31]

Course quality is also affected by other variables, including student eligibility requirements, or the academic preparation of participants. Student eligibility requirements for dual enrollment programs may have loosened in conjunction with the expanding purposes of these programs; stringent eligibility standards simply would not mesh with some of the varied purposes these programs seek to fulfill. The growing popularity of dual enrollment programs, as well as the potential revenue source they represent for colleges and universities, may exert additional pressure for more moderate eligibility requirements. Ultimately, eligibility standards should compromise neither the quality of dual enrollment courses nor the fulfillment of their purpose(s).

Faculty Issues

Choice of faculty impacts the quality of dual enrollment programs. Responsibility for teaching courses varies from program to program. College faculty teach courses in some programs, high school faculty in others. Faculty preparation is generally of greater concern when high school instructors teach dual enrollment courses. A number of programs incorporate specific requirements or training opportunities to ensure instructor quality.

High school faculty teaching in Indiana University's Advance College Project receive a thorough review before they teach, and ongoing professional development is available to them during the year and during the summer sessions.[32]

High school faculty who teach in Syracuse University's Project Advance program must have the same qualifications as adjunct instructors at Syracuse, which in most cases translates into five years' teaching experience in their subject area and a master's degree.[33]

When college faculty teach dual enrollment courses, other issues may arise, such as differing academic calendars between the participating institutions and traveling to an off-campus site/high school to teach courses. College faculty also may have concerns about whether and how teaching dual enrollment courses will factor into their teaching load, general work expectations, or decisions regarding promotion and tenure.

Transferability

Although students receive high school credit for dual enrollment courses, a key incentive for most participants is the opportunity to earn college credit. Generally, participants receive college credit for dual enrollment courses at the partnering post-secondary institution. In some programs, students must meet regular college admissions standards to get credit, must enroll in the partnering postsecondary institution to get credit upon high school graduation, or must pay course fees to the college or university to receive the applicable credits.[34]

Dual enrollment credits may not fully transfer to other postsecondary institutions. In states that sponsor dual enrollment programs, public institutions generally give credit for the courses taken through the programs. Most colleges and universities (in or out of the state in which students complete dual enrollment credit) also will work with students to transfer in and accept dual enrollment credits.

Institutional Liability Issues

Dual enrollment programs can expose colleges and universities to some liability, including:

Contract Liability: Students under the age of 18 generally are unable to enter legally binding contracts. Therefore, agreements should be made with a student's parents or legal guardians.[35] Postsecondary institutions also should be sure to articulate explicitly the terms of dual enrollment program agreements to both students and their parents/guardians, as well as the conditions for acceptance and transfer of dual enrollment credits to their institution and others, particularly within the state.

Safety Issues: Colleges and universities hosting dual enrollment students on their campuses can be expected to provide a safe and healthy environment for these students (referred to as the reasonable care standard).[36] Although institutions cannot be held strictly liable for the behavior of non-employees, university administrators should recognize that having young students on their campus may increase those students' exposure to risks such as underage drinking and student-to-student sexual harassment. Institutions should point out these potential dangers to students and their parents/guardians – perhaps as part of an enrollment agreement – and remind students of their responsibility to act safely and appropriately. Colleges also should ensure that institutional insurance policies cover these younger students.[37]

A mandatory orientation program for dual enrollment students and their guardians can provide a forum for colleges and universities to highlight student responsibilities, as well as campus safety issues and concerns. Institutions also may want to follow Massachusetts' example in requiring dual enrollment students to file a waiver request letter in order to take courses that begin after 6 p.m. on its various college campuses.

Future

Dual enrollment programs represent a trend with a strong future. Such programs can be expected to continue to serve a number of *different* purposes, including providing more academically challenging course opportunities, expanding college access, and broadening high school curricular offerings.

New technologies may significantly impact the growth and nature of dual enrollment programs. Although some colleges have been offering classes to high school students through videoconferencing for a number of years, Massachusetts is exploring providing such synchronous learning opportunities as a part of its state-wide dual enrollment program.[38] Such an approach could broaden the spectrum of students who can take advantage of dual enrollment programs, as students would not have to leave the high school campus or arrange for other transportation to a college and could take courses

during the regular school day. A few other states, including Michigan, are placing AP courses online so high school students around the state can access them. In Michigan, AP courses can be accessed through the state's Virtual High School (MVHS). Dual enrollment courses are not offered through MVHS. However, the site does serve as a portal through which students can learn about dual enrollment programs offered throughout the state.

The creative use of media has significant potential to affect the breadth of dual enrollment opportunities, their costs, and the number of students reached. The specific technologies that states or institutions choose to employ also will affect the students and purposes these programs potentially serve. For example, some programs may provide students the opportunity to experience the dynamics of a college classroom. Others will give students the opportunity to complete more rigorous academic courses on their own.

For AASCU institutions, dual enrollment programs remain a significant mechanism for interacting with local communities through partnerships with K-12 schools. These partnerships have become increasingly important for a number of reasons, including dissatisfaction with the quality of learning in the nation's public schools and the focus on teacher preparation and quality as an element of the student learning equation. Dual enrollment programs provide a natural opportunity for university faculty to take an interest in what high school students are learning, and to ensure that high school graduates leave their respective institutions prepared to meet the challenges of a college curriculum. In addition, dual enrollment programs can provide college faculty a means of gauging the effectiveness of their own teacher preparation programs, as well as exposing them to the challenges and professional development needs of K-12 teachers.

Although additional liabilities are incurred when colleges host dual enrollment courses on their own campuses, they may be worth the costs incurred. Although little research has been conducted on dual enrollment programs, existing research suggests that students participating in dual enrollment courses on a college campus expressed greater satisfaction with those courses than students participating in courses offered on their high school campuses. Students prefer the distinctive environment of a college campus and feel that it inspires them to take more responsibility for their own learning.[39] Students attending courses on campus also have access to a major library.

Dual enrollment programs have been developed in an effort to meet high school students—our nation's potential college students—where they are, academically. Such programs, when thoughtfully formulated and executed, have the potential to help both K-12 and post-secondary institutions focus more on student learning, as well as on individualizing education and educational opportunities.

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